

From May 30th to June 17th 2023

(Volume 140) BLOG#1







In LA this was a derelict ticket booth in one of the many 'now empty' beautiful old cinemas in Broadway

CONCEPT

From January 2023. This is now volume 140 and as we are old we value memories, so this time I have decided to do our usual 'Photo History' but at the same time keep a 'BLOG' What my intention is, is to keep it running contemporaneously from planning, and then daily while we are away. I am glad I decided this because by keeping it written currently it shows all the actual travel situations 'warts and all' It is really intended as a memory aid to look back at but if you are reading this we hope you will enjoy too

We had collected many, many Avios points over quite a long period by using our American Express card to make purchases. It appears that Amex charge retailers a higher transaction charge than their competitors so many retailers obviously declined their use. This of course made the points almost more valuable ...plus that carrot on the horizon....get to a certain level and your voucher value doubles.

They call this a 'Companion Voucher'. It means, in layman's terms, that an airline ticket bought with the requisite number of points is effectively doubled.- Buy one ticket and the second one of the same value is free...a great incentive, but here was the rub. The companion voucher has an expiry date and this was speedily approaching, so it meant that we simply 'had to' make use of it

It is the beginning of March 2023 and Lynn and I having decided to pay a farewell visit to the US and felt that this time a shorter journey would enable us to see more, rather than the vast mileage we had clocked up on previous occasions . Our previous 'ticking off' the vast miles as we drove endlessly was great, but we are now much older. Not wiser, just older.

We thought that the flight bookings were the main priority so we would fix them first. The allocation of Avios available seats are not always abundant so Mike at Scott's Travel was, as always, a really great help with these bookings

So the time was allocated and the inward flight to Los Angeles and outward from San Francisco had been booked.

This was a while back and stage two was now in hand and part of the fun.

Some folk love to have it all organised by travel companies but we just love to do this planning ourselves. Both ways of travel are great but everyone does it the way they like best.

PLANS

We therefore researched the California coast known as The Big Sur which approximated to Route 1 and looked endlessly at 'where to visit" suggestions on line plus speaking to friends who had done it previously.

A list of names resulted and then we delved deeper.

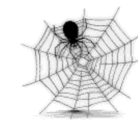
We then looked at the attractions on offer in these named places.

Dismissing some as 'beach orientated' destinations, which is not really our thing and other less attractive sounding attractions shortened the list to a reduced list of 'possibles'. Some of these we marked as possible places 'to stay' and others just 'to visit'

I then printed off a map of that well known coastline and marked the chosen places.

OK so far.





As Lynn and I discussed the trip the Big Sur was the main attraction and we were advised that starting at LA and driving up to San Francisco was the favourite route. However, here was the rub. We both also wanted to see the giant redwoods (sequoia) and apparently the best remaining groves were close to the south entrance to Yosemite. Bang went our short drive (385 miles) as this added 380 miles round trip off our planned route) - a journey each way deviating from the coast road inland, so we would have to plan a few stops on the way there and back plus time to trek in the forest to see them. We agreed that these 'off piste' excursions often left us with the best memories as one sees the real country and not just the touristy areas.

We now must decide where we would like to stay and for how many days at each stopover

Los Angelos at the start would demand possibly 3 nights and San Francisco at the end possibly another 2-3 nights.

We enjoy this planning, with the bonus of knowing in advance what is possible to see rather than finding out on our return that we have missed something special .

Once we join up the dots we will ask Mike to work with us to do the advance hotel bookings so that it is partially planned with some open-ended stops that we can decide when we are en route.

Stupidly, we thought that our choices would be spaced out so we could stay in a chosen location and then drive to the next destination. Wrong....What soon became obvious was that some were very very close together and we must decide which ones seem favourite.

We realise that despite this careful planning things can easily go wrong and the descriptions that encouraged us to see places or stay there are often not what we expected. Sometimes we will pass places that we find fantastic but no mention was made of these places.

So initially Lynn and I booked a couple of quirky b&b's plus a log cabin* deep in Yosemite all of which should prove different if not wonderful. That, to us, makes it such fun.

With the flexible accommodation booking and the relatively low mileage this time that we are planning, hopefully, we can still stop and enjoy 'little gems' as we drive through


Photo History

9th March 2023

The detour to Yosemite was a big question so we spent quite a while researching the route and where to stay.
Finally we decided to leave early from Monterey and do the journey in one go. *We found a logging cabin close to Fishcamp and the South entrance to Yosemite so we booked on Air b&b for three nights. And the hostess sounded great

It is also close to Bass Lake as well which looks great and has restaurants and lots to see.

This is our way of enjoying quirky places and the b&b have already texted us things to see and do.

Other places on route are proving more difficult so we have got an idea of costs in Los Angelos with some names and we will ask Mike (at Scott's Travel) to see which he advises and maybe also what he can find and then book.

Our original intention was to get Mike to book in a couple of other places too and we will fill in the gaps when we are there but on reflection it seemed sensible to pre-book all our accommodation

After much research, we narrowed down our 'places to stay' together with dates and we found some hotels and b&b's. Mike spent a good while running through the selection of hotels we had shortlisted and booked San Francisco, Los Angelos, Carmel etc so almost all booked now. Just a hotel for the two nights in Monterrey still to be found.

Once we join up the dots we will ask Mike to work with us to do the advance hotel bookings so that it is partially planned We have to arrange new Estas, which are good for two years from date of purchase.
Car hire still has to be arranged -
We won't need it for the first few days or the last few as the last thing we want in cities is the burden of a car. Therefore the collection points and dates will have to be determined and we hoped to collect and drop off close to our chosen hotels

So much to do in advance (just noticed that one hotel is self check in, so that must be done here in advance to get an entry code)
Also we need to take our log-ins for Netflix etc.

I have started to print off hotel booking sheets so all the info is on one page. This is so I can have a print out of each section of the route and also a note of payments, because some places are paid in advance (we have the facility to cancel up to a few days before arrival) but some have deposits with later balances due. Plus some have taxes to be paid at the location.

Obviously many ideas are slowly being discarded at this stage so I am clearing all the paperwork of places that we have decided to miss out, otherwise it gets totally confusing.

I think I'll get a map of the area we are driving through, but city maps at either end are usually best obtained free at the hotels. I'll just print off the places we have decided to visit along the route and in the cities.

All this planning may fill some folk with dread but we totally love it. The feeling of success when you arrive thousands of miles away in places that were just names on line or seen in an atlas back home, to us, make all the effort worthwhile. Plus, of course, one gets an idea of the country itself

We'll, it's now towards the end of March and Estas application have been sent off (on line), we gave our final hotel shortlist to Mike and he confirmed our choice and booked it. He also has now sent suggestions for car hire. This would allow for a couple of days at the start without a car and collection from downtown Los Angelos rather than the airport. Likewise at the end, we will return it to downtown San Francisco when we arrive there rather than the airport, again a couple of days before we leave. We don't need a car in the cities as we love to walk and get local transport.

All the hotels and b&bs, are now on sheets with all info (such as addresses, phone numbers, check in times, and if local taxes etc are due at the resort) so I can easily check on route rather than hunting for emails. (This proved such a great plan)

A few odds and ends to do before we go, include checking if Big Sur has reopened as it will mean planning alternatives if it is still closed. I also have a check list so things like driving licence, holiday insurance etc are all up and dusted. Yes, I know it is all so obvious but planning can be fun and forgetting something obvious can cause nightmares.

I thought the Estas were taking a long time to come through and had also heard that sometimes they were declined without any explanation being given so I was more than a bit anxious with this delay. A friend said his acceptance was immediate so I checked on line and both Estas were there all the time. Just ready to be downloaded and printed. I had expected an email confirmation.

I am currently reading two Bill Bryson books and the one where he retraces previous travels in the USA with his father is hilarious and I intend to copy his style 'warts and all' for our travels. It obviously won't be on his level but I hope it will be an informal account of our actual time and despite Lynn saying "not every night again, with you on the bed tapping away on the laptop" ..What can I say. Young folk may have different bed top complaints..my memory is not so good!

Some of the added travel joy is looking back at my 'Photo History' with photos I took for the sheer joy of being there and to rejoice later at the wonderful world out there and to really appreciate that we were so lucky to experience it.



Looking back now at the many volumes we realise how the world has changed and some sights and experiences will never be available again. Progress changes things, but not always for the better, but living cities constantly evolve as circumstances change and the passing of things we loved may just be pure nostalgia. If things are no longer available it is probable that they were no longer required. Old buildings, lovely as they were, possibly have exceeded their useful life and seeing a historic building surrounded by modern buildings is not always a desirable thing. Sometimes to 'Disneyfy' old architecture devalues it and maybe it should have been demolished. I say that with a real love of old buildings, so it is not said without much thought.

Anyway, I am deviating from my intention.. apologies...



THE JOURNEY

Well, an early start (5.00am) alarm and the suitcases lay open with, what appeared to be, a volume of clothes that would defy sitting on, ready for our combined squashing to get them ready for our imminent departure.

Lots of planning and a bit of last minute anxiety The USA immigration requirement of being informed of our USA address, Hotel name, zip code etc proved problematical. This requirement was emailed across just two days prior to departure and under normal circumstances would not have been a major problem as I had all this information. Where the problem arose was that I had to enter it on line via the BA booking system and BA had our previous passport numbers on their system. Easy, one would think...go into our 'settings, accounts' and update this info. Wrong....to get into our accounts was via a password-protected entry and our passwords were long lost. To make it easy one should have been able enter 'lost password' and an email would be sent to explain how to create a new one. Wrong...no email was forthcoming. This updated info had to be completed, in order to go to the next stage to obtain our boarding cards. Stalemate...BA systems were down with phones unanswered but by a stroke of luck our friendly buddy, Mike, at Scott's Travel was in the office over the bank holiday and by entering our old passport numbers and by hazarding a guess at our password from his well-thumbed notebook of our old information , he managed to update our passport numbers.

24 hours before flying we managed to print off or boarding passes. IT is great when it works but when it doesn't ...well say no more. What we will do when we get old... who knows?? (joke)

Anyway, I digress.

Yes, the two small canary yellow cases were packed without any screams and tantrums accusing one another of taking unnecessary clothes. We have come to the simple, yet obvious solution of taking only these small cabin cases, really focuses our packing and also the simple fact that if we need an extra jumper, pair of socks etc we can always buy them wherever we are. The backpack contains this laptop plus book and camera etc and when we tell friends that's all we take, and also that we take the tube to the airport, confirms their secret thoughts that we are lovable, but totally bonkers. I think they all travel with massive cases and get a taxi to and from the airports.

Each to their own. There are launderettes in every country we have visited and we agree that it is fun making use of them...even in Japan where we couldn't understand a word..but clean clothes still came out of the machine.

Our quick home systematic room check, door check , note to Vera, who is popping in to water the garden (a heatwave is expected, and I'd hate to see my mass of plants dehydrated and dead on my return.)..

Down the tube (ouch, too early to use our freedom Passes). The train was in the station and I got on with case and backpack. I then turned and to my horror found Lynn still on the platform waving frantically. Yes, the bloomin' doors had closed behind me. I hoped this didn't herald the start of holiday problems. We reunited at the next stop and luckily retained our good humour.

Miles too early (as always) at terminal 5 but a quick check in, converted our boarding passes to BA passes then a slow and thorough frisking followed. One case had to be opened to reveal our dangerous toothpaste and hair gel. 'Mrs Jobsworth' made a great show of placing them in her 'dangerous liquid' scanner and then placing them in a plastic bag which we were pointedly informed had been the requirement for at least 14 years. We stood there listening sheepishly. Neither of us had the balls to tell her that we had been packing them in our washbag for the last 14 years without any admonishment. She was doing her job, so what the hell. Anyway, on to the important part; breakfast. After touring the whole of Terminal Five we found the private lounge situated high in the attic. Well, maybe not in the attic exactly, but a long way from where we had entered the terminal. We still had tons of time to scoff a great breakfast and then discover a further airport journey via transit to 'B Satellite' and our departure gate. Amusing that one goes up and down escalators to all different levels but constantly seeing our plane firmly parked on ground level knowing eventually we will have to go up (or down) to embark.

Why do we all stand calmly by the double doors of the transit and when the first set open and then the second set, at that point someone always pushes in from the side. They then grab the last remaining seat for the two minute journey. I guess the real question is why does this antisocial behaviour always annoy us. Will her plane seat arrive at the destination before the rest of the plane? I am really too old and ugly to let this sort of thing annoy me..



Photo History



Lynn and I are now on the plane ensconced in our own boxes. This is the only way to describe the new Business class seat configuration. Sliding side doors and reclining seats with duvet, pillows, goodies bag ,headphones and a mass of knobs, buttons, levers etc. Pressed one and my seat turned into a bed, pressed another and the table slid out. I probably will have mastered all this by the time we arrive and I can act blasé like all the passengers round me. It's actually easier to drive my car.

The high point was the meal...a great start with smoked salmon and salad but the braised leg of Welsh lamb was so over-cooked that it resembled corned beef hash. It was the consistency of hair gel..and possibly tasted slightly worse Yes, I know, its airline catering, but some things just don't work. Being cooked in a commercial unit in Hounslow, kept hot in insulated containers on the A4 and transported to the airport, loaded onto the plane and then kept warm until service..a miraculous feat of endurance and sadly our braised leg of lamb did not succeed in arriving in an edible form. (This is possibly, the down side of all my years in hospitality, I know what goes on behind the scenes)

- ...anyway the staff are really pleasant and my box..sorry, seat, is really comfortable.

Damn, just pressed a button and my film started over again

A very relaxing flight but the endless snaking queue that awaited us in the arrival hall was horrendous, It was at least six lines that snaked from one end of the long, long hall to the other and shuffled like a python with Parkinson's hesitatingly toward the goal of glass boxes containing the winners of 'Sour-Face USA' . Two Brunhildas pointed out where the travellers should go. Lynn had pre-warned me against any wise cracks but by then I was too weary to protest as all our spirit had vanished after an hour in this featureless badly lit torture chamber. But the best was to come. Mr Eyemin Charge waved us to his box dismissing the Estas we carefully presented saying "just passport….stand in front of camera" Our cheery smiles were studiously ignored. Lynn was ordered to give finger and thumb prints of both hands. Admittedly she looked nothing like her passport photo but then, who does?.. Not a smile, not a greeting…..here was a man who had been 'elevated' elevated to his power throne and determined to maintain his position. I fear for his poor family…… What a welcome.

The chaotic concourse outside LAX gave no onward travel clues. Information was closed. Maybe they just open when there's no one around to tax their knowledge. Our determination to travel to The Ace Hotel, Downtown Broadway by train/bus faded after this poor start so we were conned into taking a taxi hailed by a very helpful airport guy (probably a close relative of the driver) who just 'happened' to be 2 minutes away. He manoeuvred through the endless traffic stream on the freeway to our hotel door. Over-paid...but so welcome. I hate to admit it but it was one of those moments when being fleeced was the sensible choice as the long ride on heavily congested freeways was a nightmare and The Ace Hotel on South Broadway was quite a distance from the airport and would have been very difficult to negotiate to by train and bus. The main reason was that we were totally zonked.. As we drove through the outskirts we saw the familiar out of town car show rooms, and large warehouses. I was struck by lone trees in between all the buildings. These appeared to be palms but were really amazingly tall, and dead straight, towering high over the surroundings but had no side branches and only a leafy top. As we left the freeway, forcing our way across lanes to get into our correct turn off lane, I was aware that our taxi had a 'Fastrak' token that accessed him an emptier section of the road passing the long queues at a great speed. Warning signs that only Carpool-permitted vehicles (with two-plus passengers) could use these specially designated lanes.. Suddenly an area of high-rise buildings could be seen in the misty distance. They seemed to be concentrated in a tightly-concentrated area which our Bangladeshi driver explained was 'Downtown, our destination. That famous "Hollywood' sign could just be seen in the distance too.

As we drove into the 'Fashion' district it seemed like driving into a canyon with some really high modern brash buildings towering into the sky. Giant, adverts flashed their messages across the entire buildings, in some case, demanding attention. A mas sive stadium and conference centre and fascinating modern towers were on all sides. We felt like 'carrot crunchers' up from the country as we gasped at our surroundings twisting our heads from side to side. A speedy U-turn and we were outside The Ace Hotel. We were both amazed, the exterior was totally art noveau with so many ornate embellishments we couldn't take it all in. Cases deposited outside we wished our driver a great life. He had told us after years of living in Los Angelos, he and his wife were planning on returning home. He had had enough of the out of control violence from drug-influenced youngsters that had seemingly taken over the city. He had family in Australia and Canada but was disillusioned with our chosen holiday destination. Add this to the warning Tammy had given us from her recent experiences These warnings were possibly not the welcome we had hoped for.

I had said that this blog would be 'warts and all' so my immediate impressions were critical to my ethos

The staff on the small reception area welcomed us and the whole hotel was totally quirky with bare concrete ceilings and minimalist décor. Our corner room 'with terrace' gave a new meaning to the word 'terrace'. Maybe exterior slab' would have been more honest. . A narrow tiny balcony with barely room for the two dolls house chairs and tiny table hung poised high on the fifth floor over a vacant building plot. We stepped furtively onto it in case it decided to part company with the building at any time. Our room, again with its concrete ceiling was dominated by a large bed. It had the usual facilities but took some getting used to. (we actually grew to like it!)



Then came the surprise, we were warned that it was not advisable to venture out once it got dark and therefore, despite our tiredness, we decided to 'pan out the area' before it got too dark. The whole area was what must be called 'past glory' . Fantastic buildings with incredibly ornate frontages but many were obviously now empty. Not many people around but the smell of marijuana permeated the streets. Walking past these shut up buildings was a depressing sight. A visible display of decay with graffiti, but not street art which we love. We have never seen so many fantastic buildings all boarded up and neglected. Maybe the next day would show us a different side to the area but I was determined to photograph it at night to show this whole tableau. I had not bought my camera on this initial foray as I felt maybe it might attract unwanted attention, but I was determined to get some of these shots as I felt they are totally unique. We had a salad in the café/restaurant in our hotel as there appeared to be nothing around that was very enticing that attracted us. Not a great welcome. Lynn and I felt that this was a visible display of a way of life that did not exist any more and I was doubly keen to photograph it for posterity.

Tomorrow things may look different and Lynn has planned a load of 'must sees.



The last day of May 2023..and our second day in the USA.

Woke really early feeling much more refreshed and we hoped to see LA in a better light. Not easy in Downtown. It really is such a shame to see such a glorious area of really outstanding architecture falling into total decay and the deterioration is emphasised by the large number of vagrants all around the area. I felt that we could get high on the ganga smoke evident everywhere.

Amazingly we found nothing, but nothing, open for coffee early, and believe me, we tried everywhere. We eventually located

Farmers Market and despite it being around 9.30am none of the stalls were open for business so after walking all round the gentrified market ,which was great, but was the same as London, Barcelona ,etc. Maybe we are getting jaded but we really prefer the more traditional markets not ones ‘ tarted up’ for tourists.

We worked out how to get to areas on our ‘bucket list’ but the choice was either taxi or bus as it appears that LA is not really

walkable from one area to another and the ‘in between’ areas were nothing special. So buses it was. The service was well used and really frequent and really cheap. Most users have TAP cards but we paid by cash as it was easier and we placed a dollar (for the two of us) into the slot by the driver and no change was given. By walking and asking around we found the connections and ended up in West Hollywood passing a few beautiful streets but mainly pretty poor neighbourhoods. The journey took us over 1 hour and we stopped for a burger on the way

Hollywood Boulevard was totally tacky and when you come upon places and names you have heard about all your life, maybe

ones expectations were too high but reality was sadly a real disappointment. The buses waiting for tourists, the mass of souvenir shops and the types of visitors seemed to be competing for the Mr and Mrs Weird award.

I managed (after a lot of searching) to find a stall selling sim cards as I needed a local one to avoid high charges when we return home and we looked for a coffee bar, We eventually found the only one to be found anywhere. Lousy coffee, even worse tasteless cold fruit tea and a reheated rubbery Danish sealed our desire to remain there (not). We took a bus part way back then walked to a great supermarket that we had spotted on the original journey and bought some great cheeses, prawns, cakes and drinks for later. We were delighted to share the pavement with a small delivery robot waiting patiently with us to cross the road. A second bus took us close to our hotel and we walked the short distance back, totally exhausted.

On our hotel rooftop we found a tiny tiny pool and bar and outside seating which had heaters. Fantastic views and a tree and

plants at 14th floor level completed the end of the day.

Well, almost completed because we went onto our miniscule terrace and had a wonderful picnic of cheeses, prawns with salad and cakes, looking down onto quiet Broadway.

Times like this make up for a quite dismal day and re-reading this, I apologise for the sad description , but I did say I would write it as it was and this is a true impression...





Photo History

Thursday June 1st 2023

A great restful night and we were all set for a day where we would 'tick off' some bucket list notes that Lynn had made at home and consisted of places that were etched on her "what I must see when in LA" list. They were places like Universal Studios and Beverly Hills etc. Having mastered the bus transport system, even to using TAP cards for our bus journeys. We now felt like pros and really felt that this way of getting around really allowed us to see the real LA , *warts and all..* We were totally unhappy to see that LA had a really nasty case of, what appears to be , unremovable warts. Again, the smell of 'ganga' everywhere and so many folk on the streets looking hopeless.

A local café in a fantastic old building was our chosen breakfast haunt and we were confronted by such large Toasted focaccia with prosciutto and brie that we took a doggy bag away for later. The OJ and coffee were great and we joked with the staff.

As we walked the streets and journeyed around on both buses and the metro we were surrounded by so many people who had totally lost all concept of normality and would be impossible to communicate with. No, we are not being judgemental, it was the sheer volume of people of all ages and ethnicities who seemed to be in their own world. This contrasted with the large number of Spanish speaking people who were both cheerful and spoke animatedly to one another. One really sees how the city functions by travelling around this way. We saw many virtual 'cities' of down and outs in many locations especially around the Metro stations.

A dollar was 'overpaid' for a total journey as the fare was only 35 c each but I had no small change. Hard to believe but even at this low cost we saw many people getting on the back entrance of the buses avoiding any payment. As we asked the drivers if their bus was the right one we got such a great deal of help that restored our confidence in people and we also witnessed a driver getting out of the bus to assist a disabled lady (with many bags and a real bad attitude) to get onto the bus. Despite her rants he kept his cool. We voiced our thanks to him as we got off. The long bus journey along Wilshire passes some run down areas followed by some splendid areas and when we alighted at Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, just stopping to tick off those names on the 'bucket list' we had entered a quiet religious area ...a temple to opulence and consumerism. Ugh. The types, the cars, the over-flamboyance of each shop which boasted names that we all know. Looking in the windows our thoughts that affluence and good taste are not synonymous. We noticed that each shop had a sun glassed security person standing behind a barrier specifically to convince the big spenders that average Jo Public were refused entry. A canary yellow Rolls Royce parked outside Louis Vuitton said it all..A blonde long haired lady in a dress that ..well..let's say she shouldn't have worn it at her advanced age. She was walking one tiny dog with another in a designer push chair. We gave Rodeo Drive our best shot, but we both agreed that we had seen enough and a reality check was in order.

Taking a bus followed by the Metro we arrived at Universal Studios, another 'box ticked'. Our transit shuttle bus was just leaving up the hill to the Studio. We were caged into the trailers...Maybe that should have warned us...As we neared the studio we saw a massive Disney-like parking lot with coaches etc. Not what we had expected. Security guided us past fountains into a line of barriers towards the security areas..yes..checking our clothing etc. We asked if there was a studio or a theme park but it was difficult to get a sensible answer from these guys. What was the cost of entry? No-one knew, but they pointed us to the turnstiles divided into Pre-Paid, VIP, Gold, Silver etc entry areas, Wow. They called us back having checked out the entry price on the internet. It was so outrageous that we ironically asked if that was an annual charge for a party. "No", was the serious response, "the charge is per person per entry." Over £200.00 . At that point we decided that this reality did not come close to dreams and the whole thing just did not justify our journey. Instead, we went into the adjoining area which was totally revolting. Overweight people clutching Universal Studio bags and assorted souvenirs. People posing in front of fountains, mock Dodgers Stadiums, and every food outlet was more garish, and overpriced, than the next. It really was so bad that we enjoyed the rest of our breakfast doggy bag and bought an overpriced pancake and coffee and were delighted to locate the returning shuttle bus and be caged back to the Metro. Amazingly, people enjoy that whole charade paying vast sums and considering they go in with kids presumably spend even more when inside. So glad to have 'escaped'

What a day.

Back at our hotel we enjoyed, once again, an al fresco meal on our tiny terrace and got coffees from the lobby. A chilly night but sirens from the police vehicles and more insane screams from a demented soul that we had passed earlier, echoed up from the street five floors below.

A day that did not entirely endear LA to us….Food for thought




FINE ART





Friday 2nd June 2023

A sunny day was forecast but the early morning did not seem promising. We strolled to the local café for our breakfast and were already greeted as regulars. It was a real 'local' and our set breakfast of a small toasted focaccia with OJ and double latte was a perfect start. We had worked out our way to Avis where we were due to pick up our car the following day so that when lugging our cases and backpacks we could go direct. It was only around a 10 minute walk. From there we walked to Pershin Square where we got the Red Route Metro to Sunset Bld and Vermont. Lynn really dislikes the Metro and I can not blame her. It was quite daunting with some pretty undesirable types on both platforms and trains so when we got to our stop we were delighted to come up in sunshine. An elderly guy greeted us having chatted to us on the bus, on the way to Rodeo Drive the previous day. We felt like old residents of LA after only two days. A couple of young Metro assistants had actually offered to 'ride with us' when we had checked our route with them. Everyone we asked for guidance had been really helpful.

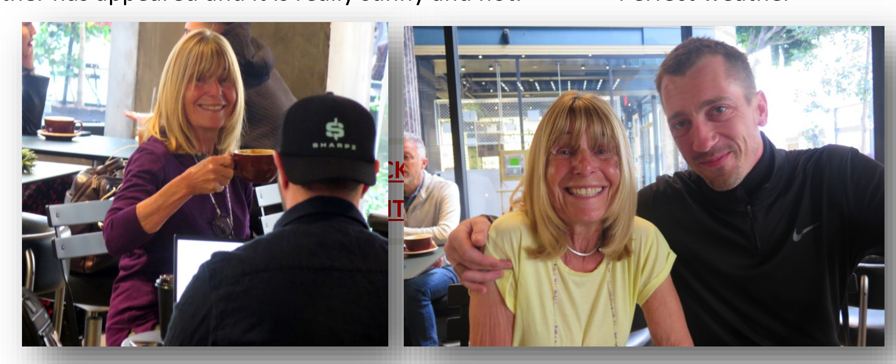
I realised later (after reading local papers) that the new Metro lines with three new stations were due to open in a few weeks and the new lines would join the main lines and enable greater access to the system. However, many problems had been encountered. Traffic problems, namely traffic jams and detours caused by the construction, passengers reported incidents of crime and harassment, officers involved shootings, and numerous deaths. Downtown's growing homeless population were taking refuge in stations and trains. The existing stations were already under scrutiny for being unsightly and less sanitary. The project is reportedly $355 million over budget. Makes our recently opened Elizabeth Line seem almost something to be proud of. Lynn hated the Metro and the stations with those weird types staring at the ground and swaying isolated in their own private world left us feeling very wary. On the trains themselves we encountered more, less than desirable, tpes. And one girl(?) got on with deafening music and no one even turned round to look at her. We were only to happy to surface I n the street

A new experience was the Dash bus which took us via Felixtown and Korea Town up the hill to the observatory and there was no charge??. Leaving the banking area of real high rise monoliths we passed through a run down depressed area with even more vagrants and then suddenly we passed an area of many small cafes in Felixtown with outside seating under the trees. The road then climbed steeply up towards the observatory and opulent detached houses were surrounded by lawns and tree-lined roads. Some of the trees were those enormously tall slender trees with no side branches and only an ill-kempt hairdo on top. Others sported magnificent trunks with massive visible supporting roots.

Another two 'bucket-list ticks' in one hit. The Griffith Observatory and yes, on the distant hill...that famous Hollywood sign.

The story behind the observatory is that the splendidly-named Griffith. J. Griffiths made a packet of money in mining and then real estate and with a philanthropic gesture bestowed over 3000 acres of brush land (as it was then) to the city. His temper was somewhat volatile as apparently he shot his wife in the face and was then imprisoned for two years. Understandably, the observatory literature made no mention of this. The observatory did not open until midday and was free. It was really quite fabulous and the exhibits were fascinating all in a wonderful situation in parkland with many walks and those views of LA mistily far below were breath-taking

We had a small snack and managed to get the free bus partially back and then with a bit of luck involving much asking many folk we managed to get buses back to Downton Broadway where we wandered around in what was, by now, familiar territory. Back to the hotel ..to our small terrace for the remainder of our provision store plus updating this blog. Our plan was then to see Chinatown, so forgive me while I work out our walking route. We are bused-out now. By the way the promised good weather has appeared and it is really sunny and hot. Perfect weather





The streets were buzzing and a contrast to previous times. Maybe Friday night is when it all happens. A group of young lads on mini scooter-type bikes gathered outside our hotel which seems to be the, go-to, place round here. The valet parking guys were starting to control the newly erected barrier as folk were arriving to go to the rooftop bar. The pizza and taco trucks were doing a roaring trade along the main Broadway street as we walked along on our quest to see Chinatown which was supposedly a straight 35 minute walk ahead.

Bikes and scooter passed us as we walked. Opposite The Orpheas Cinema a group of people were setting up light gantries and sound booms.

The surroundings quickly changed , as we walked, from the run-down , but still magnificent old theatres, to empty large shops with hoarding and 'to lease' signs everywhere. Broadway, at this point crossed over a fast freeway and we were conscious that we were totally alone except for many down and outs in doorways. We didn't feel threatened but realised that possibly our venture to visit Chinatown was not a sensible idea.

Having walked this far, we decided to continue but as we arrived, we found everything closed and deserted—a total waste of time. We turned to return and more and more vagrants were obvious, in tents and on benches, in doorways and walking aimlessly around. It reminded us of those 'end of world' films where rebel tribes roamed US streets after a nuclear war. Slowly we got back to familiar territory and outside The Orpheas Cinema we now saw a queue of people waiting to get into a 'sold out' stage performance. Film crews were now set up on the cherry pickers and catering staff took drinks to the crew filming.

Lynn suddenly realised that this whole set up was a film set (maybe for a video pro mo) and the cinema had been hired for the shoot. All the 'queue' were actually extras.

As we got back to our hotel, tired, but fascinated , the queue of young folk, outside our hotel was rapidly being checked at the barrier and going into the lift to the rooftop. Our hotel key card got us into the 'guests' elevator and we finished our, previously bought, snacks with coffee, on the terrace watching the poor extras down the street resuming waiting in their allocated positions.

The end of a great, and very different, day.

We felt that the seedy side of LA that we had witnessed, alongside affluence in a inner city environment was very disturbing and something that many people don't know about and probably have never witnessed for themselves.

It certainly left us with many unanswered thoughts.





Saturday 3rd June 2023

Our regular morning breakfast at our local café and we were greeted by the two guys as if we were long-lost family. They even posed for shots and gave us a free OJ plus farewell hugs.

Packing is a well organised part of our vacation routine and Lynn didn't even need to sit on the case. Despite having pre-walked the route to Avis to collect the car, we still doubted our directions but Google got us back on to the right way. We were greeted with a request to see our passport (buried in my body belt..so I said maybe you could put that on the notice where it says drivers licence will be requested on pick up. I was told it was obvious...no comment.

Had to wait for a returned vehicle to be cleaned and checked which was not a good start as we had already delayed departure to 10.30am to suit them The guy on the 5th level car park showed us the car but was totally unable to explain how to tie in our phone with the GPS screen. Hopeless.

We actually had to navigate out of LA using the small phone screen to guide us which is not something I would recommend. The phone audio guidance also stopped so Lynn was glued to the phone instructions.

Anyway, merging onto 101 we slowly (slowly, being the operative word, due to massive traffic queues) made our way out of the city.

New car, a maze of roads, sat nav not working, driving on the opposite side...all had to be contended with but as we got out of the suburbs the traffic lessened and we eventually marvelled at the hills all around us as the scenery became rural and beautiful. Rolling hills and as we approached our overnight stop at Santa Ynez it became more beautiful with a lake (courtesy of a damn) and recreational areas. Our directions took us to a small development of homes, each in large plots and all quite different.

Mrs Hudson's Hideaway was a quirky as we had expected. Surrounded by well cared for trees, plants and bushes Coleen greeted us with a hug. Her basset hound barked his welcome in a deep gruff voice and we were introduced to her pet geese and ducks as we were welcomed with iced tea around the pond. Elvin her Danish husband sported an enormous waxed-ended moustache and greeted us explaining that wife Coleen was the Sherlock devotee not him.

Well, we were shown up to our large room which was totally amazing. Sherlock Holmes memorabilia everywhere and the 'puzzles' were explained to us. Small moustaches were on many room features and we had to count the total. This was hilarious as we kept finding more. A shout from the toilet" I've found another on the tissue box" and so on. We also had to check out a book (luckily there was a small abridged version) to locate the blue cabochon stone. Lynn dedicated herself to this task and found it in the 'goose' as per the story. I really feel that the bottle of Mrs Hudson's home made plum wine was the reward that encouraged Lynn's search.

We arranged the main house tour for later.

We drove to Solang which we had heard about. It was a few miles away and was a dedicated total Danish town, with windmills etc. What a tourist trap but certainly worth the visit. We had a meal there which was really good. Drove back to 'our hideaway, and we were greeted by Coleen, in costume who showed us all the incredible memorabilia she had amassed.

It was fascinating and she is such a great character.

Our sat nav problem was haunting us and I even Whatsapped Vish in London for help and he responded with some ideas.

After a homemade breakfast of Danish pancakes and quiche etc, Lynn was presented with her bottle of home made 2020 plum wine (which she really enjoyed at our next stop).

Sitting in the car, I tried once again and ..yippee, I got the sat nav working ...on the screen plus with voice directions. "Looksury, sheer looksury" as Lynn would say. A fond farwell with the requisite photo shoot and we drove through beautiful country and vinyards, arriving at The Bay Hotel at San Osos (Bayford). Here, our room was gigantic with views across the bay, with a large lounge area and gas fire. We have hit lucky again.

Frustratingly, yesterday my laptop wouldn't charge and the cursor didn't work. Magically, they are now functioning again. The wonders of IT. Anyway, we are about to tear ourselves away from our delightful room to explore the area.

Elfin Forest was recommended as a local area that we really ought to see and we located parallel roads locally that all led to this area of sand dunes. 16th Street had an area we could park in and we found a mile long board walk that wound through a type of oak that was dwarf in stature. (Possibly giving rise to the name Elfin forest, The boardwalk had great views down onto the vast estuary that was at low tide and green. A unique large rock was a focal point and this was at Morro Bay further along the coast. We saw American kestrels soaring overhead and the native bushes were fabulous. The whole area was originally sand dunes and this vegetation was protected and prevented the erosion . A photographers paradise and Lynn had to throw a metaphorical bucket of water over me to prise me away from this incredible unknown unique place. Volunteers maintained the small forest with repairing the boardwalk and allowing trodden paths to regenerate.

We had researched the area and further along the coast was Morro Bay which had a beautifully situated golf course/country club above it. The town was quite pretty with attractive galleries, gift shops and a host of fish food restaurants which originally had been fisherman's warehouses

We had a great meal in a long-established fish restaurant overlooking this iconic rock. People seem to eat early and we were happy to have our meal at around 5.30. Lynn enjoyed a giant bowl of clam chowder with sourdough bread and I had local



sautéed red snapper. The portions were generous but we have become accustomed to the high cost of everything and even got used to the fact that one paid and then got the bill returned with a pen and a suggested 'tip' of 15%/20% and even 30% should be added. Wow!

We saw , and heard, seals basking just across the harbour when we had a wander around the harbour area which was closing and we then drove back to enjoy our room facilities over a freshly brewed coffee.

My laptop is having a bad vacation. The cursor is now working again and I welcomed it back with much gratitude. (No idea where it went??). However the charging cable is still very 'iffy' and doesn't like using the 13amp to USA adaptor ...so I hope I can persuade it to co-operate otherwise this blog will have to continue in longhand.



Photo History



Monday 5th June 2023

This hotel experience was very different and may signal the way things will progress in the future. I actually wonder if 'progress' is the right word. We had checked in on line leaving our credit card as security and when we arrived we were just asked for that card as prepayment security. A young guy was on the desk and explained that the front desk would be closed overnight and gave us a contact number. We were handed a plastic card with lobby key pad numbers, room key pad number (in case the activated card did not work) and we were then pointed in the direction of our room. (We are quite capable of transporting our own luggage , but obvious porter services are no longer offered). The room, as I said, was really large with a good-sized lounge area, giant bed and smallish bathroom. The fittings were fine, functional but standardised with three dispensers in the shower consisting of body soap, shampoo and conditioner. This obviously avoids running out and people 'borrowing' the soaps etc. TV remote was standard and the fresh coffee machine needed some working out. A welcome pack explained all features. Breakfast was served at a Spanish/Mexican restaurant opposite on production of our room key. The only reason that I am detailing this is to show that the 'hospitality' seems to have been syphoned out of the hospitality industry. It is now a packaged product and room rates will vary with the booking method used. If you want a coffee, the sealed package contains wooden stirrers, sweeteners, sugar, assorted tea bags etc so nothing missing which avoids those annoying calls to reception. (even if there had been anyone there). A friendly greeting and personal welcome is missing and just like MacDonalds you could be anywhere in the world. Yes, comfortable, fair price but, for us anyway, something valuable has gone, maybe never to be seen again

Anyway, as always, I digress. The breakfast was oversized and we find the coffee, with constant refills both too large and too weak . The old adage of 'little and good' seems to be our mantra. (Not that that applies to me)

The bl***y satnav again failed to show our route on the screen and this is now becoming really aggravating because to have planned a driving holiday the route is paramount and the last thing we want is for Lynn to have to be glued to the small Google map on the phone. We had tried to get maps and were greeted with amazed looks from all the young assistants we asked. " Use Google maps" was the constant answer. Boy did we feel old. It was as if we were asking for a quill pen. The young guy in the hotel was IT savvy but also gave up after a long attempt. What is so frustrating is that we know it works but can't replicate what we did to activate it. After what was possibly 30 minutes of trying it suddenly appeared and we set off.

Our destination was Hearst Castle on The Big Sur (Route 1) It is a well used route along the Pacific Ocean and at a suitable spot we drove across to the sea side and walked on the beach admiring the crashing waves, driftwood and looked out, unsuccessfully, for Giant seals

We then continued through vast plains with rolling hills where the tops were often shrouded in clouds. Again the weather was cold and grey but it didn't spoil our enjoyment despite hoping for better weather in California in June. Hardly any towns, houses or people on the long drive. Eventually we came to Hearst Castle Drive and it was on over 20 miles of pristine coastline and the 123 acre house is set in over 1000 acres of Hearst ranch. Totally over the top for one man to own all this but in true American style the tour (at $130 a head) was incredibly well organised. Large free car parks and a gift shop surrounded the ticket area. Bar-coded armbands with gate number and bus departure times were tied to us zombies. No drinking, no chewing no leaning out of windows, no touching any part of the collection other than guard rails and only stand on grey carpets inside and when outside, remain between the guide and gestapo fraulein Schmidt who vill (and did!) shout at any von straying from ze main party. Why did I feel like deliberately hiding and going the wrong way?? Maybe, by now, you may have noted that we are not overjoyed at being 'manipulated'

Anyway, climbing aboard one of three 1.00pm coaches we ascended to the top of the hill via a long, long drive and during the journey we were treated to a well planned recorded story. As we staggered out we were herded up the steps to the first level." You will please come right up to make room for the following party".

OK, I'm being flippant , because , much as we both despise this blatant show of immeasurable wealth , we, like everyone who been here, marvelled at the sheer size and planning that must have gone into this whole undertaking. The gardens and indoor and outdoor pool areas, the greeting lounge, the dining hall, billiard room, and cinema etc were all larger than life and the commentary by the guide was excellent. The time passed very quickly and two hours later we were coach-bound back down the hill through the massive ranch of grazing cattle back to our car. We 'passed' on the photo souvenir, resisted the gift shop and after struggling again with the sat nav continued though flat valleys covered with numerous vineyards and massive field after field with crop-watering sprays probably draining the local River Salinas dry in the next few years.

The route was detoured with a massive detour as the Route 1 was still closed (we had read about this over a year ago but was evidently still not drivable).



To break the drive we stopped at a small town and went into a Safeway buying hot crispy roast chicken, salad, drinks etc and enjoyed our repast in the supermarket car park. Yes, we really know how to eat out, gourmet-style, in unashamed splendour

We went miles cross country and then west again to our next destination of Carmel by the Sea. After such a long journey of over 4 hours of agriculture and mountains Carmel was a culture shock. Splendid houses in beautiful gardens and exclusive shops, galleries and over 48 restaurants. Our hotel, The Coachman Inn, was well situated and again our room was spacious, with all we could want. We dumped our bags and immediately went to 'check out the area' but the steep streets defeated us two tired beings and we slunk back to unpack and determined to see it all the next day.







Tuesday 6th June'23

A cold day once again and after asking around we were led to believe that this is not unexpected so our advance research re temperature in California in June was well off kilter. Other than possibly not being appropriately dressed we still enjoyed our day. After a hotel breakfast we checked out the really smart shops and mini malls, all tree-and plant lined. Everyone greeted us as they passed by and every-time anyone saw us with a map they couldn't help enough. However it started raining so we made a pit stop to our room (via the deli) and had an impromptu rest and break.

We found out later that this was the town of incredibly high propery prices and we saw small 'shacks' that really looked temporary and still commanded prices of several millions. The beautiful coastline and wonderful sandy beach, the golf club, the surfing and maybe Clint Eastwood being long associate with Carmel may have contributed to these eye-watering prices.

We then, map in hand, walked (via some hidden courtyard gems) down the steep Ocean Drive (the main street) to the white sandy beach at the end. Here, the dunes were reclaimed with beautiful tropical vegetation and below stretched a long beautiful bay with a golf course fantastically situated on the headland to our right and a vast beach with waves breaking and many people walking dogs and enjoying the great environment. After a long beach walk we climbed to Scenic Road above watched a novice surfer falling more than surfing and then marvelled at the residential property. Every house was surrounded by spectacular gardens and commanded Pacific views with the sound of waves breaking . The architecture was, *different,* to be kind. Small plots command spectacular prices, probably location driven.

Apparently the 'ginger bread house appearance of many was encouraged and even roof tiles had to be approved by the Local County Hall.

We walked for hours through this fascinating residential area of Carmel On the Sea and finally came out in Ocean Drive where we had a very good meal (at the strange time of 4.00pm). Our long walk had tired us out so we retired to our room and yes, we actually watched tv.

Not our normal vacation pastime but at the time it was just perfect.



Wednesday 7th June 2023

As I mentioned earlier this next stay at Monterey was only a little way up the coast and we chose it as it was said to be a lively town with an attractive waterfront and a good centre to take a whale-watch trip.

Our usual morning problem with the sat nav has actually become far more than a problem as route guidance is so necessary. Sometimes the map appears on the large car screen but not consistently. Anyway, you don't want to hear about this hassle other than a note that it became so infuriating that we contacted Avis and they agreed to sanction a replacement vehicle at their Monterey depot. The guy there was as helpful as possible but it even defeated him. He thought it was possibly a cable issue and suggested we got an alternative type. He actually gave us a Garmin satnav to fit on the dashboard so that was a result meaning we didn't need to change cars (where the original problem would have continued anyway).

We located a launderette on the way into Monterey and loaded the machine and then continued to our hotel which was a motel-type with an impressive reception area and two-storey blocks around a pool area. The room was a good size and by now we were experts. What, no microwave?   Where is the bath gel? Only 4 fresh coffee pods? Etc etc. No, seriously though, all the stays were pretty similar and perfectly acceptable for the short stays but I still prefer my home!

We walked (using a local map plus Google maps) buying the phone cable on the way to the waterfront approx. 10 mins away. The cable which should have cost a couple of pounds actually cost $26,22. Prices in the USA are totally crazy.

The harbour was very large with a lot of pristine smaller boats moored plus the small 'state of the art' rowing boats ready for a *ROW THE PACIFIC* challenge. The pier from the old Fisherman's wharf was totally tacky and if the whale watch boat booking offices hadn't been there, we would have immediately turned round and left.

Lynn was not feeling good and her heavy cold had got the better of her so we returned to our hotel with a take home from Denny's to be enjoyed(?) in our room...plus some foul tasting cough medicine to take care of my ailing wife.

I think every vacation has a couple of negative days and this was really a double minus...





Thursday 8th June 2023

Great, we woke and the sun was shining with a blue sky and everything took on a new meaning. Even Lynn felt better after a good long nights sleep.

We strolled down the road close to our hotel and found a local deli called East Village Deli. Sitting outside in a small park area we enjoyed a macchiato and mini samosas with a hot chai. We got chatting to the Nepalese owner who was a fascinating guy, living here with an American wife and two daughters. He gave us a local book of 'what to see' and we some useful info.

Wending our way down to the harbour we chatted to one of the English girls who was part of the support crew for the Pacific row contest which was due to start next Monday (weather permitting) The crews range from 5 down to only two and they have all the provisions they need for the journey which , amazingly, can take up to 70 days. We tried to envisage what it must be like being on the high seas in such a tight confined space with others. The lack of privacy etc plus some obviously challenging situations must make this an incredibly difficult feat of endurance. Yes, they have support yachts and communications and all is tracked with family and interested parties able to follow on various social media platforms. They do it for charity and must be pretty exceptional people and the crews are both men and women crews.

We walked the length of the pier, past the endless shouts of 'ours is the best clam chowder, try some" and garish sweet houses where you collect a BUCKET and fill it up with an overdose of sugar poison. Seafood cafes lined both sides but the illusion of fresh fish caught locally vanished when we saw the refrigerated deliveries of frozen fish unloading from the main highway.

Our destination was the Princess Whale Watch where we had enquired about costs and duration the day earlier. The great lady there remembered us and gave us a $10.00 discount each as we had, unlike many other, returned as promised.

To mark time before it sailed, we found a secluded Spanish garden in the rear of the local museum with fountains, seats and total tranquillity.. The small Custom House museum itself was delightful too.

We boarded at 12.30 and sat to one side of the boat which was not overcrowded. A young girl naturalist introduced herself on the speaker system and gave a super commentary throughout the 2.5 hours and told us where to look. We were treated to a blue sea, calm waters, a wonderful sunny day and very soon we saw a pod of riso dolphins and they were very close to the boat. Heading further out we saw several humpback whales signifying their presence with high water jets from their blowholes. A mother and calf were feeding on small squid and anchovies and treated us constantly to acrobatic displays of gliding on the surface then diving and appearing elsewhere to repeat their display. I constantly had the camera pointed to where they had dived in and not having a clue where they would resurface I would have hundreds of shots of blue seas o be checked to see if I actually managed to get any shots at all.

This was such a great trip and Lynn had been looking forward to this for ages and it was even better than we had dared to hope for. Another mayor 'tick' on her bucket list.

We chatted to the naturalist who came round to see if any of us had questions and we had learn a lot of information such as their life expectancy could be as long as 60 years and the calf stayed with the mother for approximately one year drinking the very rich milk ...as much as 100 gallons a day.

We then located a Safeway where we wanted to buy provisions for the next days picnic but the walk proved to be approx. 1 hour up the steepest roads we had ever encountered.

We witnessed the end of a minor two vehicle collision on the return walk but what amazed us that sirens heralded two police vehicles closely followed by a fire engine and then an enormous fire department cherry picker that \I guess would be used in major disasters. This really seemed a case of overkill

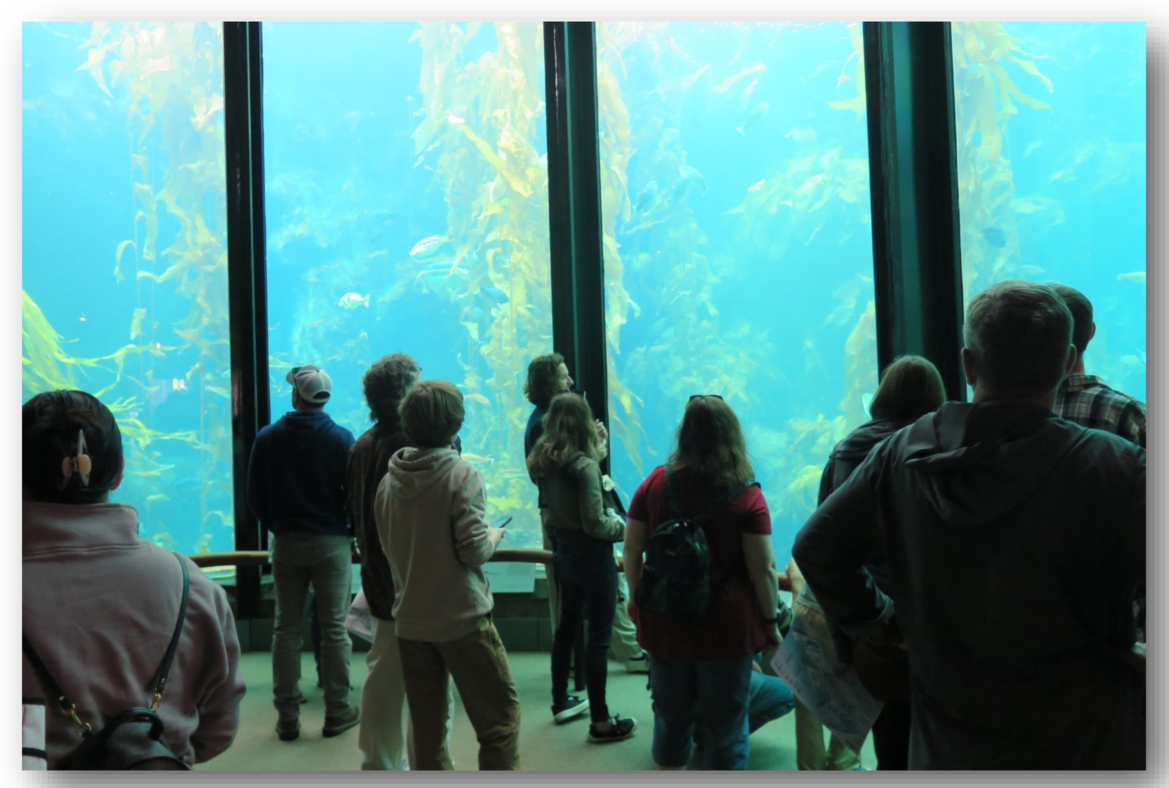
We were totally exhausted and had a quick pizza in a small café on the way back and agreed that today was a much better day and , yes, the weather certainly gave a new perspective to Monterey



Friday 9th June 2023

Our backpack was straining with the goodies we had bought for our picnic and we took the, now familiar, route down to the harbour where we picked up the coastal bike/pedestrian coastal trail walk which mostly went along the coast and partly along the famous Cannery Row which , obviously, was now gentrified since Steinways Cannery Row novel.

From the information along our walk we learnt that Monterey was the centre of the enormous sardine canning industry but with overfishing the harvest of sardines totally dried up and the fortunes of Monterey changed rapidly. By all accounts the canning process was highly labour intensive and the work was hard, hours long and conditions terrible.



The coast was protected and access was prohibited as Stamford University had their marine department there so we found a great spot overlooking the sea and tucked into a great al fresco feast. We had passed the well known aquarium earlier and had booked tickets on line. Tickets could not be bought at the entrance since covid and it was a lengthy business to do it on the phone in the street which made me very sceptical about how many of my contemporaries would cope with this scenario,

Anyway, after our picnic we walked back to this very large and celebrated aquarium, and were told that we should allow at least two hours for our visit. We were not convinced that we would be there for so long but were astounded about how well presented the whole marine display was envisaged. We were there for over 3 hours and marvelled at the whole display. Every-one there, of all ages, seemed to be enjoying the whole day out and we also came away very happy with making this a ‘must see’

Back to our hotel in the early evening as tomorrow we have a long trip to Yosemite. Probably 3.5 to 4 hours so we must pack very early. We have spotted a great-looking local breakfast café which opens very early so our idea is to load up the car, have a quick breakfast there and scoot off by 8.00am.

Our stay in all the places on route to date have been so different that we are never bored and have become quite adept at finding our way around, both on foot and driving.

Sometimes, on our travels , we find that we have actually seen, and experienced, much more than many of the locals we chat to on route.



Saturday 10th June 2023

An early start as planned. We were packed by 6.30am with cases in the car and had phoned front of house to let them know we were checking out. A short walk round the corner and we enjoyed our breakfast in the local deli which had the reputation for offering the best breakfast in Monterey ...and it was!! The short stack of buttermilk pancakes was so enormous that we got it packed to go and even later when we tried to finish it, it still defeated us. Lynn had French toast with syrup which she somehow managed to consume. How locals eat like that daily amazes us.

A bakery was just opening up and and was full of the most delicious cakes etc so we stocked up for the evening.

I then waited in the car, planning the route while Lynn did her final room check,

She came down, opened the car door and just looked at me quizzically. I looked back at her waiting for her explanation. Nothing was forthcoming, she just looked at me and said “well??”. I still did not understand what was troubling her.

She then said “ perhaps you would be better off in the drivers seat”. It hadn't dawned on me that as I was so engrossed in route planning that I was sitting in her seat. Admit it ralph...you're getting old!

When our laughter had died down we filled up and, like magic, the sat nav worked. With a long journey ahead this was a blessing.

The route took us around 3.5 hours with just a pit stop for a milkshake (etc) and was totally different from any of our previous journeys. Starting with rolling hills and sand dunes and no sign of houses anywhere, it changed to massive, but really massive, totally flat farmland that was constantly being irrigated with a maze of sprinklers as far as the eye could see.

Then we drove through orchards stretching for miles in every direction and all totally symmetrical with just the occasional numbered road intersecting them, presumably to access the fruit for picking. The trees were unfamiliar to us so we pulled over and found one type were green apricots or peaches, then futher on small oranges or satsumas. Then we passed miles and miles of pistachio orchards. Many of these orchards were for sale and we wondered how easy it would be to get labour out here to pick this quantity of fruit or nuts. A totally unknown world to us. We saw occasional small houses along the road where we assume the farmers lived and there were large areas where farm machinery was stored. We saw no towns or even small villages for miles and miles so life must be pretty hard and remote for farmers and pickers here.

The dead straight road with virtually no traffic then passed through a linear development which gave us a chance to stretch our legs after the long journey. The usual names appeared such as Starbucks etc and we found many plots for sale . A really strange environment because as soon as we left, we were again on a dead straight road with just these large featureless fields on both sides stretching as far as the eye could see in every direction. With the need for this level of irrigation and only a few fairly depleted rivers we wonder if this level of production is sustainable, We both felt it was like an ‘accident’ waiting to happen. More crops to water added to an increased requirement from the surrounding population must mean that something will have to give. I had heard that reservoirs were not refilling as in previous years due to climate change so a rationing system was already being considered

This is currently on the web site of the local water supplier...*As climate change-induced extreme weather continues to disrupt California’s water system, the State Water Resources Control Board has readopted two emergency regulations that prohibit certain wasteful water use practices statewide and encourage Californians to use water wisely and make conservation a way of life.*

Slowly, the scenery changed again to massive rock-strewn fields that were ranches and we wondered how the cattle could graze on the grass that looked very yellow and dry. The road then merged into a busier freeway with much more traffic as we came towards the Yosemite area and a small town we passed seemed to be an historic recreation of the old gold prospectors town. Adverts for the Bass Lake and train rides and local restaurants were now displayed on both sides of the highway. We then turned sharple off onto a very narrow road into the forest which wound its way through trees with cabins hidden away with exotic names and after much twisting, turning and climbing we came to our hidden beautiful lodge where we will stay for three nights. We met Chiela our Air B&B hostess and after mastering the key lock with the advised numer we were delighted to find very modern amenities in this hidden-away location. A wonderful large terrace surrounded by massive pines (where lynn is relaxing on a settee while I write this blog on my patio lounger. A microwave, bbq, log fire, fresh coffee machine, Smart tv, radio, torches and lamps, air con, and a fridge with waters etc. The shower/ bathroom had fluffy towels and all those nice touches that make such a difference.




To ensure we maximise the potential of our stay we booked an hour long train trip from Fishcamp and purchased a multiple entry Yosemite entry ticket . Our plan is ...train ride/ visit to see the mighty redwoods (our main reason for this very convoluted detour from big Sur)/ Visit to Bass Lake and possible a meal there (depending on what is available)



Photo History

Sunday 11th June 2023

Today we planned a train ride and visit to the famous sequoia (giant redwoods). It was quite chilly still and we seemed to have bought inadequate clothing expecting hot Californian June weather.

Wrong!!

Anyway we got to the Sugar Pine narrow gauge railway early and watched them steaming up the beautiful engine. As per most American attractions, it was well organised. The hooter blasted out and the bell tolled and the shout "All Aboard" and we clambered aboard the open carriages. Two very long logs had been cut into utilitarian seats which added to the 'logging' feel. The railway followed an original logging route and we slowly went deep into the forest with much evidence of previous fires. The fire risk is very great here under certain conditions.

The railway was only about 10 minutes from our cabin deep in the woods so our choice of location was excellent.

It also proved to be on the main CA41 direct to the South Entrance to Yosemite . We had researched the best place to see these giant sequoias and Fishcamp was shown as the nearest place to stay outside the National Park. This had a population of only 200 with no obvious accommodation, so our cabin in the forest was a great choice.

The road was winding towards the Yosemite entrance and we had prebooked entrance. The pass was only $35.00 for seven days for a private vehicle, which with the prices we have been confronted with on this vacation, seemed excellent value, The road approaching it was marked with signs "from here 30 mins mins.wait" This gave us an indication of the popularity of the massive park. However, we speedily went through the ticket gate but the parking area we wanted was full and we were directed about 6 miles further on to the next car park having been assured the first car park would be opened in 30 mins. As that was the area where the giant redwoods were, we returned and managed to park and immediately boarded the free shuttle to the foot of the boardwalk and trail. The walk was everything we had hoped for . Looking up the massive trunks of these magnificent trees one almost fell over backwards. There were groves of over 500 specimens and at the end were three special sights. The Three Dames, The Giant Grizzly and the final piece de resistance of the Tunnel Tree where people walked through the enormous trunk.

The statistics we read about these trees were stunning and had been marvelled at for generations and hopefully will continue to give pleasure to future generations too.

It was quite a tiring walk and we were delighted to, once again, immediately get the free shuttle down to the car park.

As I mentioned before, everything is so well organised but one thing we failed to comprehend is the massive scale of the National Parks.

We had a rest back at our cabin and then found a dark wooden local lodge filled with deer heads and a bar which, considering how off the track it was, was surprisingly busy.

My large rib eye steak was great meat but over seasoned as were the vegetables accompanying it. We have noticed that no cruets are offered so maybe the clientele appreciate having everything seasoned in advance. Lynn's burger , as always was a massive plateful and we then drove the short route home along the windy road with a really sharp turn off into the woods.

During the day there had been a massive downpour which, luckily, we managed to avoid...but read that the London weather was in the 80's ,

Our luck..




Photo History





Monday 12th June2023

An early drive to Oakhurst (the nearest town).and we wandered around. These towns are completely dependent on the freeways going through them and are quite narrow developments with restaurants, cafes, garages , supermarkets etc and many shut-down units too. Some large impersonal hotels grouped together seemingly to accommodate visitors to Yosemeti as there's nothing closer. We found a really cheerful, well stocked supermarket even better than a Safeways and then had breakfast at Pete's Eats which was cheerful, typical American and enormous servings. We always plumped for the smallest available and were constantly still amazed at the size.

We then took a side turning off the CA41 to visit Bass Lake which we had researched as a beautiful lake and recreational area so we figured would be agreat spot to park up and enjoy a walk. Big mistake.

It was a lakeside development of smallish plots with totally different architecture many fronting the lake with moorings and pontoons. Full of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts'. Obviously an exclusive summer cottage area as many were empty with alarms clearly displayed. The rest of this very large lake had viewing point (where parking was chargeable) and no walks. One resident told us she had been coming to her home here for 20 odd years and would love to have places (around the lake) to walk on. We were confused to see 'astroturf' around some of the plots and some visible stumps where some of the wonderful trees had obviously been cut down. Considering the incredible nature all around this seemed like very suspect attitudes, but on reflection if the owners came from the city we guessed they would not appreciate cutting the lawn on their arrival…"None so strange as folk.

We enjoyed a milkshake at Ducey's a very nice lakeside restaurant and then drove on and had a 'fish and chip ' meal at an 'order window ' at Miller's where we got a buzzer calling us to collect. Again giant portions and a couple of youngsters at an adjacent table were eating a Titanic iceberg of multi-coloured shaved ice that must have permanently frozen their innards.

We witnessed many older folk driving around in golf carts and many houses had family names with large carved wooden bears displayed on many plots.

This is a popular boating and water sport area as evidenced by many RV pull off areas where canopies were featuring families enjoying the outdoor life. Apparently the narrow roads are mobbed at holidays and weekends

We were both really full of this nasty cold bug that left us coughing and feeling run down so we had a sleep in the car and when we woke we decided to drive right round the lake. This proved a bad decision as the Garmin (old lady of the GPS world) took us the wrong way and even into two dead ends. Not the easiest place to find our way back from but luckily I found the convoluted route back to Pine tree Forest.

When we got back we packed and let Chiela know we were departing early and thanking her for the great accommodation (Just like the previous Air B&B the hostess left great reviews of Lynn and Myself as perfect guests which is a nice feeling.

James was general manage of the group and delighted to help



Tuesday 13th June '23

Unfortunately, our coughing was so severe, it was lucky we were hidden in the forest as we would have frightened the natives in a confined area. We actually felt better but sounded dire. Anyway, on with the travels. The weather was actually improving and we had only approx. a two hour drive to San Jose. Lynn was now directing me like a pro navigator and made sure I was looking for certain road numbers and which lane to go in etc. This made it so much easier. We were now using google maps on my phone which despite being a small screen was a sensible, easy to follow interface.

The next hotel, in San Jose proved to be a challenge. This was a 'virtual front desk' check in system. . No staff at all and we had thought incorrectly that we could access the hotel and do it all there. However, we should have done it all in advance. When we arrived we couldn't even access the lobby until a departing guests let us in.

OK, I am fairly IT literate but I still found it very difficult. The screen in the lobby 'talked you through check in procedure' but this became so annoying after the twentieth time. We were requested to log in and the download an identity (friving licence proved ok. My photo was the requested and only accepted on the third attempt. We were then require to enter our booking reference but this was 'not recognised' three times. In frustration I phone the help line and was talked through by the 'front desk' in a different country. It appears the zeros of noughts on the booking reference were not the same. Despite giving my Us number they still managed to text a link to mu UK number. Three quarters of an hour later we got to the lobby near our room and met a real person! Wow.

James was general manager of the group and officially 'off duty , but was delighted to assist. He agreed that 50% of clients loved this system (but bearing in mind that San Jose was one of the main silicon Valley cities, is not surprising) I admitted we were the 50% of the generation that 'hated' it and felt it had taken the hospitality out of hospitality. He admitted that when recently, he had gone to Texas on business for the group he was unable to check in despite 'knowing the system inside out' due to an IT glitch. He also commented that it was lucky he was there (as he was officially off duty, as our auto room key didn't work plus ...sin of sins… the tv remote was missing. After staying in 8 hotels we find this system discouraging, to say the least. As I mentioned, I am fairly competent with technology, but, without being patronising, how are some of my contemporaries going to manage?? The room key pad lit up when we 'high fived' it and opened for thirty seconds before self locking when one had to high five it again and enter the individual personal number issued.

Bloody hell we just wanted a room for the night!!

Walking around we notice everyone is now using their phones for everything. To pay on buses, to pay for parking, to scan menus to order food, and again if this technology goes down life ends abruptly. I often wonder if my boarding pass is on my phone and my battery goes down how do I board my plane?

Anyway, on a serious note, the room was comfortable, light and airy and good value but totally impersonal



Wednesday 14th June 2023

A good night's sleep left us feeling much better. Still with our hacking coughs and sniffles but both feeling miles better, we left San Jose following six lane freeways (after a shakey few wrong turns and the jouney to San Francisco was only about 1.5 hours and we were conscious of slow traffic build up in ther opposite lanes.. Entering a new city is always a nightmare but we are now past masters at avigation and my star navigator took us directly to the hotel. As we were very early, we deposited our canary yellow cases and backpack with the bell service and then filled up the car prior to returning it to Avis a short distance away. We parked it on the third floor of a parking lot and returned the keys (secretly rather pleased not to have the hassle of a car in the city)

We walked to Darren's Diner for breakfast (how could we resist that name . And Darren himself was a great guy and we enjoyed the (massive) breakfast.

Our hotel The Rui, is in fisherman's Wharf which is the cnetre of where it all happens. Close to Pier 39. close to Golden Gate Bridge, close to Alcatraz Island, close to Nob hill, Chinatown and the financial district. The only down side is the 'upside' Steepest hills ever. What must the old people do when they go out...maybe get someone to roll them down hill?

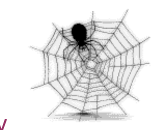
We got a 28 bus to the Golden Gate Bridge and our proffered $5.00 fare was refused...no idea why. We walked in the beautiful park below (just as Tammy had insisted we do) and found it fascinating to look up at that well known icon above us. Wildlife plants were planted around and were mostly in full blossom.

The clouds had lifted and we took photos galore. We watched sailboarders skimming along the bay and Alcatraz was no longer cloud covered. I said that when we got off the bus I would follow Google maps back to the hotel.

Lynn, my guide and mentor, calmy pointed out that maybe we could manage without Google on this one occasion as we were actually standing right outside it.

I knew that of course…..('liar')

We collected our bags and walked 'what seemed like miles' along corridors to our room. Once again, a great room, light and airy and despite the size of the three storey hotel (over 500 rooms and 1200 guests, it was very well organised . The layout and appearance was very pleasant. It was close to the seafront and piers. It was only three storeys high with attractive landscaping plus seating around firepits in a central area. But with that number of guests there must be problems. The lift was always slow and we took to using the stairs rather than waiting. The breakfast queue was large but brilliantly organised and we sat watching in total amazement as a large number of overweight people carried overfilled plates dodging between one another to grab yet another cake. There almost seems to be an unwritten rule that totally inappropriate clothing is a must-wear ensemble for breakfast. Without being too impolite we have never seen such gargantuan backsides and displayed in such tight t ill-fitting trousers . Better than any cabaret...Staff were busy clearing tables with a military precision, mopping spills, and indicating with their special sign language when tables became free and how many seats were there. The 'greeter' then directed guests via more staff to their seats. Meanwhile kitchen staff constantly replenished the large buffet which had several locations. I spoke to the head chef and he asked me if it brought back memories and we had a laugh together.


Photo History


Thursday 15th June'23

We walked from the hotel the short distance to the famous Pier 39 which despite being very commercial was again , well run. Flower landscaping tubs and boxes and all floors were full and all floors were being swept and mopped and even waste bins were being washed. All individual units were being set up and again everyone was bust cleaning their areas, ready for the day ahead. Yes, it was a typical tourist are but it was well done. I even succumbed (much to Lynn's disapproval) to two fridge magnets: a ghastly filled burger one and an even more ghastly pink doughnut with multicoloured sprinkles. No home should be without these...Lynn threatened to walk ahead of me unless I put them in a bag..

Platforms were floated in the sea at the tip of the pier and had been requisitioned by a colony of enormous fat wobbly rasping seals (Made me think of breakfast for some unknown reason) They all seemed very happy there and were a great attraction.

We walked along the seafront by the piers and passed an attractive restaurant called Hillstone opposite so we popped into their garden for a drink. It slowly filled up and we noticed that the décor was really great and with a beautiful open plan kitchen and my favourite on show; A large rotisserie of plump herb seasoned chickens rotating appetisingly. Well, what more can I say, we waited for over an hour until they were fully cooked and Lynn had a beautiful house salad to accompany me. We had struck luck because it turned out to be one of the best (and most attractive) places we had eaten in on our entire stay in California..

Tammy had given us a list of places that she had recently been to with full instructions of exactly where we had to visit (and when not to visit 'as it wasn't safe') . We walked up to Nob Hill. And by 'up' I mean UP. The San Francisco streets are known for their steepness and on a hot day at our advancing years, believe me, it was struggle. However, walking and meandering through the financial district, with its towers of opulence disappearing into the clouds and then Chinatown which is much apparently now emptier than in previous times. Some areas have got delightful and different small houses full of character. Some districts have got small delis and restaurants which will come alive at night but during the day seemed quiet.

It is the prelude now to gay pride week and flags and colours are everywhere. Some hotels and banks were proudly displaying Stars and Stripes alongside Gay Pride banners and flags atop their flagpoles. The Fairmont had hundreds of Gay Pride flags. And a local church had steps in the colours.

The views over San Francisco (almost) made that step climb well worthwhile. We relaxed in a small park called Huntington Park in a square right in the centre. Like many cities these small parks are like well loved breaths of fresh air in a crowded environment and this was well maintained and well used.

Lombard Street is the famous east–west street and is famous for a steep, one-block section with eight zig zag hairpin turns. Lynn remembers driving down when were here years ago.

The weather was baking hot and we had an ice cream from a Nob Hill shop which just appeared , like a mirage, just as Lynn was saying "I'd love an ice cream right now"..

We collapsed at the hotel and walking most of the day and seem to have covered miles.

After our rest we decide to walk along the wharf locally to the hotel but the whole area seems to have changed at night. It was only 8.00pm but nearly everything was closed, or closing, and the types hanging about didn't really add to an enjoyable evening. We were aware of how many shops , large and small , were empty and 'To Lease' signs were everywhere. A town in decay, hanging on in the daytime to make the best of a declining market

We booked our taxi to the airport for the following day










500
Bush











Photo History





Friday 16th June '23

After the morning 'wobbling flesh' display, we walked the coast road from Pier 39 to Pier One (via the ferry terminal) where we watched in amazement as the giant cruise ship, Ruby Princess disgorged passengers and took on board 6500 passengers. The resultant gridlock was being valiantly controlled by police with very little effect. Cars, taxis queues of people and total confusion confirmed our opinion of cruises. "Not really for us, but thanks anyway." "Don't knock it till you've tried it is the usual retort"

Pier One was a commercial 'gentrified' area with attractive shops and small restaurants and cafes

We just got a notification that our flight was delayed by 2 hours so we changed our collection taxi time The brand new yellow cab was speedily driven to the airport and we then spent time in the well run lounge at San Fran until flight time

As it was overnight we slept well and then got a tube back to a hot and sticky London.

Glad to be home